

Tuesday, January 2, 2007

A New Year: It's a new year, a new Congress and a new majority in Washington. Leading up to November, Nancy Pelosi talked about an agenda that Democrats would pass in "the first 100 hours" after they became the majority in the House. Since then, she has "clarified" that she really meant the first 100 legislative hours, not calendar hours. So, that means about two weeks. She also has made it clear that this agenda will be brought straight to the floor bypassing committee votes and many other House rules and procedures. As a member of the minority, she was extremely critical of the Republican majority for anything approaching this kind of legislative short-cut. I guess it's OK if she is the one doing the short-cutting.

So what is this first 100 hour agenda upon which votes are likely to begin as soon as Friday? Here's a preview as well as my predictions:

- Minimum Wage: The House already passed a minimum wage increase this past July. It was linked to a permanent death tax reduction and other tax credits so it did not pass the Senate. Pelosi has pledged to bring a stand alone minimum wage increase up this month. I predict that it will pass both Houses and that the President will sign it. But, it will have very little economic effect. Most populous states, including California, already have state minimum wages that are higher than the proposed new federal minimum.
- 9/11 commission recommendations: Pelosi's promise was to pass all of the recommendations of the 9/11 commission. She has since indicated that the Democrats will not include the recommendations that would limit their power in Congress or result in any scrutiny of their operations. Republicans have already passed 39 of the 41 recommendations. The items that were not acted on were either counterproductive or inefficient means in the larger goal of national security. Whatever bits they now find to push forward, I'm sure they will have the votes in the House to do it. We'll see about the Senate.
- Ethics reform: The ethics reforms (lobbyists, gifts, meals, etc.) proposed by Pelosi's leadership are not substantively different from the ones passed last September. I'm sure they'll pass as they did four months ago. Their proposals won't matter for much. Steak dinners don't make people corrupt. The ability to hand out tens of millions of dollars of taxpayer money to private organizations without accountability leads to corruption. The real reform would be to take away or greatly restrict such "earmarks". But it doesn't look like the House leadership has the stomach for that.
- Student loans: There will be an as yet unclear package of college tuition affordability proposals, perhaps including more and cheaper student loans and more taxpayer subsidies along with increased tax deductibility of tuition. It's hard for me to say whether this is good or bad or will pass or not because we don't yet know what it will be.

Even if you support all of this (which I don't) and it were all to pass and be signed by President Bush, do you really think that this package is going to make a noticeable positive difference for the country? No, it won't. Rather than these symbolic four items, let me suggest four we should be dealing with instead:

- Energy Independence: It takes a long time to have any new policy on this subject to begin to make an impact after it goes into effect. So, we need to get started immediately, and we should be able to do this on a bipartisan basis. I will be very involved in a specific proposal about which you will hear lots from me in the future.
- Iraq: Everyone agrees that the situation in Iraq has deteriorated in the last few months. All reasonable people also understand that it is very much in our national interest to make sure that Iraq is stable and not a terrorist state. We should put aside the election year rhetoric and find bipartisan agreement on the best way to achieve that.
- Entitlements/Budget: Social Security and Medicare are horribly inefficient and will eat up the entire federal budget by 2050 if we don't do something. Most of Congress is afraid to touch it for fear of being attacked as wanting to end these programs. However, to leave them alone is to destroy them both. We should be talking about those reforms now. I will.
- Economy/Tax Cuts: The success of the tax cuts in improving the economy and raising federal revenue is unquestioned. But they are all scheduled to expire by 2011. Let's make them all permanent now.
- This is not to say that these four are the only issues. Obviously there are lots more. But these are just the first 4 on which I would hope we could have some bipartisan agreement. I don't know if Democratic leadership will read this e-mail. I hope they do. We have a lot more important things to do than proposals that sound good on paper but won't have a substantive impact.

At least there is some hope for the New Year. Things are off to a good start southern California. USC soundly defeated Michigan yesterday in the Rose Bowl.

Happy New Year! Until next week, I remain respectfully,

Congressman John Campbell